

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Telecommunications & Information Administration**

Evaluation of the
Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program

Case Study Report

**Project InterLinc: Information Services Division
95010**

Lincoln, Nebraska

Site Visitors: Nicole Bartfai and Barbara Kapinus

Dates of Visit: April 21-23, 1998

PREFACE

On behalf of the National Telecommunications and Information (NTIA), I am pleased to share the following report that is one of a series of case studies conducted on grants awarded by the Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program (TIIAP) in 1994 and 1995. The case studies are part of the program's evaluation effort designed to gain knowledge about the effects and lessons of TIIAP-funded projects. NTIA contracted Westat, a research and consulting firm, to perform an independent evaluation of the program's first two years of grants. The evaluation consisted of a mail survey of 206 grant recipient organizations and in-depth case studies of selected projects. In February, 1999, the Commerce Department released Westat's evaluation report.

The projects selected for the case studies cover a broad range of program types and sizes, planning grants as well as demonstration grants, and they show varying degrees of implementation, sustainability, and replication. Westat selected the projects to represent a cross-section of all projects funded in the program's first two years. Specific selection criteria included geographic region, target population, project application area, project category, and size of award. To conduct each case study, Westat reviewed all project files, including progress reports and the final report, and conducted site visits. The site visits consisted of project demonstrations and interviews with project staff, representatives of partner organizations, and project end users.

NTIA thanks the case study participants for their time and their willingness to share not only their successes but their difficulties, too. Most of all, we applaud their pioneering efforts to bring the benefits of advanced telecommunications and information technologies to communities in need. We are excited about the case studies and lessons they contain. It is through the dissemination of these lessons that we extend the benefits of TIIAP-funded projects nationwide.

We hope you find this case study report valuable and encourage you to read other TIIAP case studies. You may obtain additional case studies and other TIIAP publications, including the final Westat evaluation report, through the NTIA web site (www.ntia.doc.gov)_or by calling the TIIAP_office at (202) 482-2048. We also are interested in your feedback. If you have comments on this case study or suggestions on how TIIAP can better provide information on the results and lessons of its grants, please contact Francine E. Jefferson, Ph.D. at (202) 482-2048 or by email at fjefferson@ntia.doc.gov.

Larry Irving
Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information

THAP CASE STUDY

Project InterLinc: Information Services Division

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1995-96 public access grant awarded to the Data Procession Division of the City of Lincoln, Nebraska was designed to extend opportunities to underserved residents using newly placed terminals and Internet connection. Project InterLinc was designed to “deliver useful and practical government services to empower citizens with information to health/human services, public safety, and assist with voting, community forums, and communication with elected officials.” The project had two goals:

1. Develop public access through building the infrastructure and access to hardware, and
2. Build websites that will support the delivery of government and related services to Lincoln and Lancaster County residents.

The first of these goals was to be met by building the infrastructure throughout the city and county by installing terminals that had Internet capability. This was to “level the playing field” for residents that were isolated by distance and disadvantaged by language barriers and economic status. It would further enable sites to access Lincoln government services that were being presented through InterLinc websites. To meet this second goal, terminals were placed in 18 urban sites including the public libraries, ethnic community centers, and the senior center, as well as in 11 rural villages around the city. Each site was responsible for determining the location of the computer.

The website construction started with interactive content that describes government-related information and services related to each department and agency available to Lincoln and Lancaster County residents. InterLinc offers a look at city and county departments; schools; public records; phone, fax and e-mail information of the government employees; and numerous other services and connections. The InterLinc website was designed to have standardized pages that would easily be replicated on the websites of each participating community/department. To further increase the services provided to InterLinc users and others that had Internet capability, the government installed a real-time connection between the IBM mainframe and the Internet. Citizens could now obtain government information without visiting the city/county offices. They could look up employment opportunities, health-related information, and other important government-related services.

Problems experienced by the project were in part due to a lack of internal support and the need to resolve community concerns over the misuse of the Internet. Community groups were concerned with children gaining access to uncensored information on the web and asked that InterLinc terminals be censored. Each site has autonomy over the InterLinc computers, and therefore each dealt with the concerns in their own way.

The underserved populations targeted to benefit from the project were able to access government information and services without having to visit the city/county building, as well as to gain access to the wealth of information that is available over the Internet. The impact of the project extends beyond the local residents to all users of the InterLinc such as people traveling to the Lincoln area or other looking to relocate to Nebraska. In addition, project partners such as Aliant Communication and Information Analytics were able to promote their own success through their efforts to enhance the project. At the time of the site visit, the city government was supporting InterLinc, and Internet connection was still being provided at no charge to sites.

B. OVERVIEW

Purpose and General Approach

Project InterLinc was designed to “deliver useful and practical government services to empower citizens with information to health/human services, public safety, and assist with voting, community forums, and communication with elected officials.” Two objectives were established to achieve this goal:

- Develop public access through building the infrastructure and access to hardware, and
- Build websites that will support the delivery of government and related services to Lincoln and Lancaster county residents.

Public access was achieved by placing terminals throughout Lincoln and Lancaster County. In the City of Lincoln, terminals were placed in four ethnic community centers, city libraries, the senior center, and the park and recreation centers. Other terminals were placed throughout Lancaster County in rural villages surrounding the city. The strategic placement of the terminals enabled citizens who were isolated by distance and disadvantaged by economics to access government services and related information via the Internet.

The website offers interactive content that describes information and services related to each department and agency. InterLinc offers a look at city and county departments; schools; public records; phone, fax, and e-mail information of the government employees; and numerous other services and connections. The InterLinc website was designed to have standardized pages that would easily be replicated on the websites of each participating community/department.

Description of Grant Recipients and Project Partners

Grant Recipient. The Data Processing Division, which services the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County, applied for and received a 1995-96 public access grant to improve the telecommunications in their community. As a division of the county and city government, they provide technical, operational and development services regarding government records and all computer and networking needs. Their Project InterLinc was staffed by the following persons:

- Project manager - responsible for management, public relations, and administration. The City of Lincoln donated a portion of his time during and after the grant period.
- Webmaster - a portion of his time was and still is donated by the City of Lincoln to assist in the technical aspects of developing the websites and government infrastructure.
- Full-time web assistant - responsible for keeping the content “fresh, timely, and accurate.” She was hired in the spring of 1997, and at the time of the site visit was still primarily responsible for web updates on InterLinc sites. Her sources of information included weekly updates from Division personnel, city council members, county commissioners, and staff of other local government agencies.

Project Partners. Several project partners were major contributors to the overall success of Project InterLinc. NAVIX is the Internet service provider (ISP) for InterLinc terminals. They are a division of

Aliant Communication, which was once Lincoln Telephone and Telegraph. Aliant joined with the Data Procession Division to provide web-based government services. Before the project, Aliant had worked with the city to develop a fiber optic network that would service Lincoln through kiosks. At the beginning of the project, they offered a 50 percent reduction in their ISP rate for 18 months during a 3-year contract that amounted to approximately \$44,000 of in-kind donation.

Another key partner was Information Analytics, a computer-consulting firm that offered technical support for building websites. They provided a 20 percent reduction in rates for Project InterLinc. Beyond the grant period, they continue to meet with InterLinc staff to review and discuss new technological advances.

KFOR, a radio station in Lincoln, provided free Internet access to citizens before Internet became popular. They filtered the service to be family friendly, but it allowed citizens to learn and use the Internet without charge. Project InterLinc asked KFOR to promote InterLinc on the radio when they discussed their free Internet access. KFOR continues to promote Project InterLinc on the air and on their website, although it has stopped providing free Internet service.

Nebraska Education Telecommunication (NET), a public broadcast television station in the Lincoln area, became involved in Internet development with their project, NebraskaNet, a website providing information for and on all of Nebraska. The NET director interviewed during the site visit commented that NET left Project InterLinc because of laws regulating public television stations and the use of the Internet. The staff of InterLinc has been asked to manage NebraskaNet.

Project Cost

The program had a \$548,651 planned operating cost, of which \$185,000 was federal money. The federal portion supported the start up of the project and facilitated the purchase of a larger server and faster processors. The other \$300,654 was from the applicant and partner donations. Actual operating costs were slightly less. Only \$147, 440 of federal money and \$290,640 of the applicant's contribution were used. Total operating cost during the grant period was \$438,080. The project director commented that the unused federal money was returned to TIIAP.

C. PROJECT CONTEXT

Community Description

Lancaster County has approximately 213,000 residents, with 192,000 located in the City of Lincoln. Lincoln is home to the University of Nebraska main campus, a major employer in the area. The economic base of the community is farming and agriculture, and that has remained constant over the past 50 years, but Lincoln continues to grow. From 1990 to 1995, Lincoln and Lancaster County have experienced a 7 percent population growth, including a rapid influx of ethnic populations. The latest census information indicated that these citizens are forming clusters in specific areas, which now are among the lowest income areas in the region. Outside the city limits are sparsely populated agricultural villages, many of which have populations of fewer than 500 people.

Status of Telecommunications/Information Infrastructure Environment Prior to the TIIAP Project

Prior to the TIIAP grant, the Data Processing Division had been looking into ways to provide government services to remote locations and to enable citizens access to government services 24 hours a day. They were researching laying fiber optics and developing a kiosk system that would deliver limited services to citizens. Eventually Lincoln Telephone and Telegraph and Information Analytics approached the project director with the idea of employing the World Wide Web, and Project InterLinc was begun.

D PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Activities/Milestones that Occurred Prior to the TIIAP Grant Period

Once the concept for Project InterLinc was adopted, the project director set out to obtain internal and external funding. Prior to receiving TIIAP funding, support was built internally by explaining to city officials the cost-effective benefits associated with providing government services via the Internet. The director attended a TIIAP workshop and became more interested in public access via the Internet. He enlisted project partners including Aliant Communication, Information Analytics, Nebraska Public Television (NebraskaNet), and KFOR radio. The partners provided the initial technical support and legitimacy for the project.

A goal of the project was to broaden the scope of InterLinc to address underserved populations. The targeted populations were the disadvantaged ethnic population and the rural communities. Armed with support letters, the director went to the mayor, city council, and county commissioners for backing. He also solicited support from four ethnic community centers: Asian (Vietnamese), Hispanic, Malone (African American), and Native American. The downtown senior center also agreed to participate. The next task was to achieve the support of the rural communities. The director went out to the villages, and demonstrated the Internet prototype at city council meetings in hopes of selling the idea of using the Internet in the villages. The villages needed a location for the InterLinc terminals and a site navigator, who would be trained to use the Internet by project staff. Eleven of 12 villages agreed to have hookups.

Activities/Milestones that Occurred During the TIIAP Grant Period

The project was to be implemented in three phases. Each was targeted for completion in a 6-month period. Phase I involved the physical planning, preparing the sites, and deploying the hardware. Project staff distributed a PC, printer, router, and Internet connection to each urban site. On December 4, 1995, the mayor issued an executive order establishing InterLinc. The Lincoln Convention and Visitors Center website was established and accessible via the Internet by March 11, 1996.

The next goal was for each government department to have its own website. The departments were responsible for submitting the type of information to be included, but the navigation structure of all websites was consistent to make them user friendly. The same icons were used on subsequent pages to allow a user to move easily around the website. Once a site was up and running, the particular department was responsible for providing the web assistant with updates. Changes were made on a weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis. Weekly updates were received from the Personnel Department, City Council, County Commissioners, Citizens Information Center, and Urban Development. Later, each village was provided a website, which displayed a picture of the building that houses the InterLinc computer, along with information on the community. The site navigator in the village was responsible for providing the web assistant with any updated or new information.

Phase II involved deploying hardware (a computer, printer, and router) and providing Internet connection to these rural sites by October 15, 1996. Phase II also included database transaction processing that was to be accomplished by October 15, 1996. This achievement made InterLinc the first in the state to (1) have online voter registration, (2) publish election results via FTP interface, and (3) bridge an IBM mainframe to the Internet. A bridge between the IBM mainframe and the Internet allowed Lincoln and Lancaster County residents access to database information. The information could be retrieved in real time allowing citizens to have the most up-to-date information. Data from the mainframe were updated every half-hour during elections, allowing citizens to know who was winning the election as the election results were being tabulated. Other information is also available via InterLinc. People can find information on lost-and-found animals, tax records, snow routes, and warrant lookup. Another important accomplishment during this phase was obtaining a secure site that would protect user identification. Vendors use InterLinc to verify petitions throughout the community.

During Phase II, training was provided for approximately 60 site navigators. Each site named a person responsible for learning about InterLinc and the World Web World and they were provided basic training by InterLinc staff. In order to accommodate the needs of the rural communities, training was done at each site by project staff. Other training occurred outside the scope of the grant for citizens. The Parks and Recreation System charges a \$5 fee for citizens to be trained on Internet basics.

Phase III was designed to allow secure financial transaction to occur over InterLinc websites. The Data Processing Division gained approval locally and at the state level, but questions associated with the 2-3 percent additional transaction fee hampered the completion of this phase. Staff have continued to work on achieving this phase and hope to see its completion in the near future. This will be discussed further in the section on project goals not met.

Steps Taken to Sustain Project Activities beyond the TIIAP Grant

With the end of federal funding for Project InterLinc, the director approached city/county government for continued project funding. The city allocated money to help pay for administrative costs, which included the project director, the Webmaster, and a full-time web assistant. In addition to administrative costs, project funding continued to support Internet connection for the sites. Project staff hope this will to be a long-term commitment by the government, but the possibility of funding continually changes as the political environment changes in Lincoln. Currently, access to InterLinc services is free, but the project director is unsure how long that will last. An encouraging sign of the sustainability of the project is a Government Access and Information Committee made up of elected officials and others who act as a steering committee for the project.

Activities/Milestones that Occurred Following the TIIAP Grant Period

The project continued to expand after the TIIAP grant. Government services are still available to citizens via the Internet, and Project InterLinc continues to support terminal connections in Lincoln and throughout the rural villages. Website construction is where most of the attention and resources are now being used. Citizens can now retrieve county property assessment records and county tax records. The site also has forms and information available for pet licenses. Project staff continues to work on establishing a secured site for financial transactions.

In addition to providing services over the Internet, interactive kiosks were installed in the new City County Building. They are hooked into the server and have touch screens for easy use. This was done

through the KIOSK Access Project with the assistance of Information Analytics. The funding source of this project was not determined during the site visit.

Issues

Project InterLinc wanted to include the underserved populations in the rural areas but they encountered some resistance from strong traditional village governments. The project director went to 12 villages to promote InterLinc and demonstrated the capabilities of the Internet at each village's council meeting. Each site was offered a computer terminal to be placed in a central location in the village, and eventually 11 of the 12 villages agreed to house a computer to hook up to the Internet for residents. Lincoln decided that the villages would have control of the computers with only two requirements: (1) the computer is accessible to the public, and (2) someone is trained at the site as a site navigator.

Problems

Difficulties for the project stemmed mainly from a lack of understanding and/or support for the project. Internally, a problem with lack of support from some elected officials as well as city service departments created barriers for Project InterLinc, which the project director attempted to mediate by building support through increasing media exposure for Project InterLinc. Another mechanism for building support was to set up a voter registration site. This was regarded favorably by elected officials, who then provided support for the project.

Another problem was the fact that not all of the partners understood their role in the project. When NebraskaNet left the project, the grant recipient was left with additional responsibilities not originally intended. During the site visit, it was unclear what impact the grant recipient, project partners, and the project experienced because of the Nebraska Education Television (NET) departure.

Other problems were at sites and with end users. Despite the fact that each site had a trained site navigator, some sites did not understand how to facilitate system use. At one of the village sites that was visited, it was clear that the center staff who were interviewed were not heavily committed to seeing the system used by citizens who visited the center. These barriers, created by the site, limited public access to the Internet and InterLinc.

Public access to the system led to some misuses. Sites were broken into and terminals were stolen. This was not a huge problem, but it certainly raised concern among the project staff. Censorship was another issue that developed when providing public access to the Internet. Some community members wanted to limit the type of sites that are accessible through the public terminals, which was met by resistance from several project sites. The public library installed screens that limit others from seeing what a computer user is accessing, but that did not limit what was accessible on the Internet. The Parks and Recreation Center have taken a different approach. They placed the computer monitors where adults can supervise its use, thus limiting the types of information people could view over the Internet. Parent groups that say their children should not have exposure to some information support this approach.

E. PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND IMPACT

Technology-Related Accomplishments

The project had two major goals: buying and installing hardware that supports access to the Internet, and building InterLinc websites. The first project goal was met when 37 terminals were installed in two cycles. Eighteen terminals were installed by June 23, 1996, in selected urban locations, and terminals were installed at 11 rural sites by April 24, 1997. Project staff installed the computers, each equipped with a printer and a router, and Aliant provided the Internet connection. Each site also had 12 ports for Internet connection with only one line dedicated to an InterLinc terminal, thereby enabling sites to connect other computers to the Internet. Access to new technology enabled citizens to obtain new and potentially useful information and help traditionally underserved Lincoln citizens gain access to government services over the Internet.

The second technological accomplishment was the construction of the InterLinc websites permitting citizens to access information on Lincoln and Lancaster County government-related services. Project InterLinc was the first in the state to provide government services over the Internet, and later became the first to provide real-time connection between the government IBM mainframe and project websites.

Impact of the Project on Direct End Users

End users were broken into two categories: (1) the residents of Lincoln and Lancaster County, and (2) nonresidents that used InterLinc websites. The impact on the second population will be addressed in a later section. This section addresses the end users defined by the project goals--the citizens of Lincoln and Lancaster County using the InterLinc terminals and websites. The rural and urban placement of the terminals dispersed access to the Internet and government-related services throughout the region, and two-thirds of the InterLinc computers were placed in sites designated for traditionally underserved populations. During the site visit, we learned first hand how the computers were being used at two urban sites, the public library and senior center, and three of the rural sites, which included a school, a community center, and a county office building.

Urban sites. At the senior center, the computer and Internet access have opened up the world of information technology to the staff as well as the seniors who come to the center. The InterLinc computer was placed in the main entrance to the center. The coordinator at the senior center referred to several senior citizens that use the computer to e-mail family, but the biggest advantage for the senior center was their ability to connect their computer-training lab to the Internet. Internet training has now been incorporated into the computer classes for the senior citizens. Staff at the center are also beneficiaries of the senior centers InterLinc connection; they have been able to access information via the Internet, but they have also used the connection to communicate with other staff members.

The end users at the public library terminals range in age, education level, and ethnicity. Library patrons can only use the four InterLinc terminals to access the World Wide Web--there are no other application programs on the computers. During the site visit, we watched as several students used the computers to access information for school projects, and the technology coordinator at the library commented that people often use the access to the Internet for job hunting. He also discussed the library's plans to expand Internet connection to other terminals by using the connection established by Project InterLinc.

The impact on the users at the ethnic community centers was not observed during our site visit. It was discussed in the final closeout report, which states that two of the community centers have added an additional computer through other grants and business partners. With the connection provided by InterLinc, these computers also have Internet capability.

Rural sites. The village of Denton recently built a community center that provides services to their residents. They hold local board meetings and coordinate administrative and community services for the village. Before InterLinc, the site had two computers, neither of which was connected to the Internet. Another important aspect for Denton was the 56K capacity that would not have been possible without the InterLinc project. The clerk at the community center said that the project gave them an additional computer and the ability to link one of the previously owned computers to the Internet. She discussed several citizens that have used the InterLinc terminal and have become enthusiastic about the capabilities of the Internet. Some users have purchased their own computers and Internet connection after using the access provided by InterLinc. However, there was little mentioned by the office clerk of how it was used to gain access to government-related services and information.

Before the project, staff at the Hickman government office used the computer to do billings, keep the treasurer's books, and monitor the waste water system. No one at the center was using the Internet. Now, the staff use InterLinc to look up tax records, get information on local government agencies, and track legislation, but little public access appeared to exist. The terminal was placed in the back of the center, there was little advertisement that the computer was for public use, and the location did not make it appear approachable for citizens. However, the staff was pleased with their access and felt there would not be Internet access for center staff and citizens without the InterLinc project.

The last site visited had the InterLinc computer placed at a school. We interviewed the technology coordinator for the Palmyra school district and he felt that the project increased overall awareness of technology in the district. "The access for the community to Internet and government services is a major accomplishment." While only a few people are actually using the Internet to look up their taxes, quite a few look for information on the Internet. People who were once unaware of the Internet are now regular users, and those who cannot afford their own Internet access at home can gain access at the community site. The impact on the village has been substantial, allowing village residents to gain access to the Internet and providing an opportunity to bring the school and community together. "Having access in the school has given the community a better understanding of what the school is doing, especially with technology." The computer labs at the school are open at night so citizens can have access to the computers and to Internet.

The full impact experienced by direct end users was difficult to report because the time constraints only allowed for a limited number of site visits. Overall, the citizens appear to be using the public access terminal, and some are using the government services provided through InterLinc. Circumstances and use vary from site to site and therefore it is difficult to report on whether these site visits represent all sites with InterLinc terminals. There was no documentation at any of the visited sites as to the number of people using the terminals, again making it difficult to determine the full impact.

Impact of the Project on Other Beneficiaries and/or the Overall Community

Each of the communities that welcomed an InterLinc terminal benefited from the project. It enabled the villages and urban sites to forge a relationship with the city government that was previously not established. Many benefited from the InterLinc terminals because more people used the Internet and became familiar with computer technology.

InterLinc services were available to more than the citizens of Lincoln and Lancaster County; it was accessible by any users that choose to access the InterLinc website. For example, before the site visit to Lincoln, the site team was able to get information on hotels, restaurants, and other events in the Lincoln area. It provided a map of the city and surrounding areas. This is helpful for visitors to the Lincoln area or any persons interested in moving to Lincoln.

Impact of the Project on Grant Recipients and Project Partners

Two of the project partners benefited from Project InterLinc. Although Aliant had previously established itself as a telecommunication company in the Lincoln area with the explosion of the Internet, InterLinc helped establish a client base especially in the rural area. Project InterLinc increased Aliant's opportunities to provide new services to the growing population of Internet users. InterLinc's success also assisted Information Analytics as they continue to grow in the Lincoln area. Since 1985, they have been contracting with the city government and had previously established a partnership with Aliant. As part of the project, the company had the opportunity to build products that would later be marketed for other projects. The growth of the company has also allowed the company to bring on new staff. The media attention and advertisements provided on InterLinc websites were added benefits for the project partners.

KFOR radio and Nebraska Educational Telecommunications (NET) were not heavily invested in the project and mostly spoke about the benefit of the advertisements displayed on InterLinc websites. NET staff regards participation in InterLinc not so much as benefiting NET, but simply as their duty to the community. In summary, these two project partners were strategically selected by the project director but had little to do with the daily running and activities of the project.

Project Goals Not Met

The original proposal called for InterLinc websites to allow citizens to be able to conduct secure financial transactions. The project staff envisioned websites that would allow citizens to pay taxes or tickets or to obtain a dog license over the Internet. This proved difficult because of additional costs associated with credit card transactions. An additional 2-3 percent would be charged to either users or the city/county government, and this could not gain complete support. The project director continues to work on this aspect and has gained approval by the state and local officials, but no one will absorb the additional cost. Consequently, while not yet a service provided by InterLinc, the staff continues to consider it a project goal.

Impact of TIIAP Support on the Initiative

The TIIAP funding permitted the grant recipient to develop a project that was more extensive than the originally planned kiosk system. The funding increased support within the government and other departments and enhanced the legitimacy to the project. The TIIAP grant also helped extend the focus of the project to incorporate disadvantaged populations.

F. EVALUATION AND DISSEMINATION

Evaluation

No formal evaluation was planned prior to the project, and little was done formally to evaluate the impact of Project InterLinc on direct end users. Project staff considered the awards received from three widely recognized Internet groups as evidence of their success. The tourism section received recognition from POINT, who named it in the top 5 percent of all websites; Magellan, who named InterLinc a three-star site; and the Epicurus Group of Companies, who named InterLinc as one of the "Best 500 websites." Recognition from the state and from Washington, DC, was another indicator to project staff as to the overall success of the project. In 1996, staff were asked to attend TIIAP grant awards demonstration as a successful project, and in 1997, they attended the Nebraska Governors Conference as a featured "Nebraska Success Story."

A summary of the activities for the InterLinc websites was compiled by a software package. In the exhibit below, information is provided on the average number of hits, length of users' sessions, and other characteristics. This information is collected each month and could be used in the future to look at the trends in usage since the beginning of the project.

INTERLINC LOG FILE

General Web Server Statistics	
Date & Time this report was generated	Tuesday July 01, 1997 – 07:30:13
Timeframe	06/01/97 – 06/30/97
Number of Hits for home page.....	11290
Total No. of Successful Hits	194784
Total No. of User Sessions.....	11068
User Sessions from (United States)	88.07%
International User Sessions	0.95%
Origin Unknown User Sessions.....	10.96%
Average Hits per Day	6492
Average User Sessions per Day	368
Average User Session Length	00:14:41

Dissemination

At the local level, the project director was acutely aware of the necessity to share information about the project with government officials and the media. Press conferences were held periodically throughout the grant period to promote InterLinc websites and the public access terminals that were available for public use. The media coverage increased opportunities for more people to hear about InterLinc terminals and the government services that were provided through the websites. Demonstrations were another mechanism to illustrate the capabilities of the Internet. Project staff gave 84 demonstrations on InterLinc to 1,119 individuals. Some of these were to show the capabilities of InterLinc and others were training sessions for site navigators.

At each site, dissemination of Project InterLinc terminals was left for the site to promote and advertise. Several sites announced InterLinc access in newsletters or announced the InterLinc capabilities in local meetings. The library offered seminars to teach people how to use the InterLinc terminals. Each site took a different approach in disseminating the availability of the computers.

At the state level, the project had several opportunities to be recognized. Project InterLinc was named a "Nebraska success story" in 1997. This allowed the project director to demonstrate Project InterLinc and discuss the project. Other state-level access occurred when the technology coordinator at the public library was accepted to present at the state library conference. He discussed the advantages and future plans for Project InterLinc at the library.

G. LESSONS LEARNED

Many of the important lessons learned by project staff dealt with the administrative aspects of the project; few involved the actual design of InterLinc websites. First, project staff and partners spoke of the importance of being "partner wise." It was important to be selective when choosing partners and to find partners who "make sense" for the project's success. Also, establishing and maintaining good business relationships throughout the project, accomplished through frequent and meaningful meetings, was important. Constructing a detailed plan as to each party's roles and responsibilities in the project was vital, as was addressing each partner's level of commitment to reduce any potential problems that may occur later in the project.

Second, staff must consider the political environment. It was important to gain support from elected officials and other key political figures. Gaining this type of high-level support helped increase the longevity of a project. Another important group is the media. Including the media in Project InterLinc events or achievements increased the notoriety that the project received.

Third, sites need training that is more extensive as well as more opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions about InterLinc. Providing time for sites to exchange ideas on how to use and promote public access and use government services is beneficial for overall success of the project. Fostering discussion and sharing of ideas can increase the impact of the project on intended end users.

Finally, it is important that project staff do not underdesign the system. They need to stay on the leading edge of technology, because technology is advancing at a rapid pace, but still remain user friendly. At times, compromises were required to accommodate both needs. For example, the use of graphics on websites is extremely popular, but project staff understood it would slow response time. Project staff decided to limit the use of graphics and enrich the text to ensure quicker response time. Careful planning as to the structure of the websites will establish a good framework for ongoing development.

H. FUTURE PLANS

Project InterLinc is established as a presence in the community and on the Internet. They have plans to continue website construction in order to increase services. They are working to resolve the difficulties with obtaining a financially secure website, but no timeline was provided. Other plans include a feedback section for InterLinc users in order to document how useful and beneficial InterLinc terminals and services are to residents. Along with these plans, Project InterLinc will assume responsibility for Nebraska Net, a Statewide Internet Clearinghouse and monitor the Lincoln Convention and Visitors Bureau websites.